No. 18.

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE.

At a special meeting of the UNION LEAGUE OF PHILADELPHIA, held at the League House, on the 11th day of January, 1864, on motion of MR. MORTON McMICHAEL, seconded by MR. WM. D. LEWIS, the following preamble and resolutions were unanimously adopted:

"*Whereas*, The skill, courage, fidelity and integrity with which, in a period of unparalleled trial, ABRAHAM LINCOLN has conducted the administration of the National Government, have won for him the highest esteem and the most affectionate regard of his grateful countrymen:

"*And Whereas*, The confidence which all loyal men repose in his honesty, his wisdom and his patriotism, should be proclaimed on every suitable occasion, in order that his hands may be strengthened for the important work he has yet to perform:

"*And Whereas*, The Union League of Philadelphia, composed, as it is, of those who, having formerly belonged to various parties, in this juncture recognize no party but their country; and representing, as it does, all the industrial, mechanical, manufacturing, commercial, financial and professional interests of the city, is especially qualified to give, in this behalf, an unbiassed and authentic utterance to the public sentiment. Therefore,

"*Resolved*, That to the prudence, sagacity, comprehension and perseverance of Mr. Lincoln, under the guidance of a benign Providence, the nation is more indebted for the grand results of the war, which Southern rebels have wickedly waged against Liberty and the Union, than to any other single instrumentality, and that he is justly entitled to whatever reward it is in the power of the nation to bestow.

"*Resolved*, That we cordially approve of the policy which Mr. Lincoln has adopted and pursued, as well the principles he has announced as the acts he has performed: and that we shall continue to give an earnest and energetic support to the doctrines and measures by which his administration has thus far been directed and illustrated.

"*Resolved*, That as Mr. Lincoln has had to endure the largest share of the labor required to suppress the rebellion, now rapidly verging to its close, he should also enjoy the largest share of the honors which await those who have contended for the right; and as, in all respects, he has shown pre-eminent ability in fulfilling the requirements of his great office, we recognize with pleasure the unmistakable indications of the popular will in all the loyal States, and heartily join with our fellow-citizens, without any distinction of party, here and elsewhere, in presenting him as the People's candidate for the Presidency at the approaching election.

"*Resolved*, That a committee of seventy-six be appointed, whose duty it shall be to promote the object now proposed, by correspondence with other loyal organizations, by stimulating the expression of public opinion, and by whatever additional modes shall, in their judgment, seem best adapted to the end; and that this committee have power to supply vacancies in their own body, and to increase their numbers at their own discretion.

"*Resolved*, That a copy of these proceedings, properly engrossed and attested, be forwarded to President Lincoln; and that they also be published in the loyal newspapers."

GEORGE H. BOKER,
Secretary.

The Will of the People.

Much criticism of the policy of Mr. Lincoln's administration has been based upon a strangely erroneous notion of the genius of our institutions. It has been generally assumed that the acts of the President have been the exponents of his own individual convictions. Democrats have censured him for converting the "war against disunion" into a "war against slavery." Radical Republicans have been equally prone to condemn him as a half-hearted Abolitionist, who required perpetual stimulation to perform his duty, and who is not to be trusted because he did not, immediately on his inauguration, carry out the views which he had previously expressed of opposition to slavery.

Both parties seem to have equally forgotten that our form of government is as purely democratic as can be reduced to a practical system. Our whole political machinery is devised for the purpose of allowing the people to regulate the national policy. The will of the people is supreme. Congress and the Executive derive their power solely as embodiments of this popular will. They are placed in power for the exclusive purpose of carrying into effect the wishes of the nation, and beyond this narrow circle of duty, the utmost they can do is to mould public opinion, to which they have no right to run counter.

It is not in question whether this may in all cases be desirable, or whether this form of government is perfect. The fact is absolute that the people governs itself, and that it has a right to demand that its affairs be conducted according to its convictions. Many of our rulers have lost sight of this fact, and when once placed in office have sought to make the popular will bend

to their own prejudices, or to their peculiar views of policy. It is Mr. Lincoln's pre-eminent characteristic that he has never lost sight of the great organic law of our political being.

For twenty years prior to his election he had, on all fitting occasions, expressed his disapprobation of slavery, and his desire that it could be constitutionally done away with. Yet in the popular vote which made him President he saw the expression simply of a determination to resist the aggressions of slavery, and not the condemnation of the system itself. His views as a private man were, therefore, to be subordinated to those of the country, and from the hour of his election he was careful not to express an hostility to slavery, which, in his position, would have expressed the policy of the incoming administration.

But a comparatively small portion of the public recognized, at first, that the rebellion was founded in slavery. Fewer still but believed that slavery was an element of weakness in the South. There was a general conviction that the system was incompatible with civil strife, and that it would soon be swept out of existence in the whirlwind of war. Coupled with these was a very general desire to avoid the responsibility of its destruction, and of the terrible upheaval which that destruction was expected to cause. Mr. Lincoln may or may not have been more far-sighted than the mass of his fellow-citizens. If he were, he contented himself with recognizing and obeying the popular voice.

The earlier acts of his administration, therefore, manifest no desire to interfere with the internal structure of Southern society. Not only did he scrupulously abstain from arousing hopes of freedom in the minds of the slaves, but he publicly declared that nothing should be done to alter the condition of a single inhabitant of the States in revolt. Those States were invited to return with all their original rights and privileges, and the efforts of the North were restricted rigorously to the overthrow of the military oligarchy which resisted the laws.

The dream of a thirty or ninety days war passed away. With the prolongation of the war, the South developed powers of defence and aggression which few among us had foreseen, and

the vicissitudes of the conflict gradually opened our eyes to facts which had not been generally understood. The conviction insensibly spread that the strength of the rebellion lay in slavery, and that we could no longer allow our military policy to be controlled by the constitutional scruples which were wholly out of place in so desperate and doubtful a conflict. We recognized at last that the rights, which had been so reverently respected among peaceful members of the republic, could no longer be claimed by those who had defiantly endeavored to destroy the Constitution, and that it was useless longer to solicit the return of men who boasted that no proffered terms could induce them to assent to reunion.

Many men in Mr. Lincoln's position would have disregarded this change in public sentiment. A revolution of policy on so vital a question looks too much like an acknowledgment of error to be agreeable to those whose false pride shrinks from the reproach of inconsistency. Short-sighted men saw in it the danger of losing friends, and of giving new weapons to enemies. Fortunately for us, we had a ruler who could rise superior to personal motives and to petty vanity,—one who could read almost intuitively the popular heart, and who recognized himself to be the servant of the people. As the nation changed its views, so he was ready to change his policy. When, therefore, the Emancipation Proclamation made its appearance, the people was prepared to welcome that which, a year earlier, would have aroused a tempest of disapprobation. It is true, the pro-slavery element among us still was formidable, and this deadly blow at the cherished institution aroused its fiercest wrath; but the impotence of that wrath showed how truly the President had measured the progress of opinion, and how fully the nation was ready to sustain his position.

The next step was the arming of negro troops. In July, 1862, Congress authorized the employment of "persons of African descent" in our armies. The public mind was not yet prepared to accept the assistance of the despised race. The possible consequences of arming slaves shocked many; the secondary results of elevating the negro to a soldier, and allowing him to

fight shoulder to shoulder with us, alarmed still more. The administration accordingly did not press the matter. It would do nothing without the cordial assent of the people. Prejudices fast wore away, and at length the time approached when an experimental trial could properly be made. One or two regiments of freedmen were organized, and it was found that the fears of indiscriminate revenge and rapine were groundless. The characteristic obedience to discipline showed that, for garrison duty and occupation, the colored troops could safely be relied on; and the increasing difficulty of procuring volunteers in the North produced a general conviction, that in the African brigades we had found the solution of several problems which had sorely exercised us. The President hastened to obey the general call for an increase of this portion of our forces, and colored regiments were organized throughout rebellious territory with all possible energy. The attack on Port Hudson showed that the fighting qualities of these troops were as distinguished as their other soldierly attributes, and a demand arose in the North that the free colored population should be turned to account.

Those who have witnessed the marvellous revolution in public opinion on this subject cannot but admire the manner in which Mr. Lincoln's honest deference to public opinion has produced results which the tact of the cunning statesman might have failed to secure. Taking each step as the voice of the people demanded it, he has never been forced to retrace his position. Supported by and supporting the popular feeling, he has moved onward in unison with it, and each new development has afforded sure foothold for further progress. A year ago, in Philadelphia, a negro in uniform could not have walked the street without insult or outrage. In a few short months, crowds assembled to cheer the departure of a colored regiment embarking to fight their battle and ours. Last July, the citizens of New York could not obtain the assent of their Governor to form such an organization, and the brutal fury of mobs threatened to exterminate the race. Now Broadway throngs to give an ovation to the dusky warriors pressing to the front.

In times like these, the world moves fast. In the great crucible of civil war, old-time prejudices and worn-out convictions are melted and dissipated like dross. Men who, three years ago, would have perilled their lives to preserve from reform the institutions of the South, now acknowledge in those institutions the deep-rooted cause of our troubles, and have resolved that the downfall of the rebellion shall carry with it all that gave the rebellion vitality. The people no longer desire a patched-up peace, lasting only till the defeated combatant shall recover his vigor for another deadly assault on the life of the nation. There is no vindictiveness in this. We ask not for punishment; but we demand that the sacrifice of our blood and treasure shall not be in vain. We desire our children to be spared that which we have suffered. We are ready to restore our erring brethren of the South to all the political rights which we ourselves enjoy; but we have the right to require that they shall divest themselves of the curse which has risen like a wall of separation between us. This is at last the profound conviction of the nation, and well has it been answered by the President. His Proclamation of Amnesty puts into practical shape the wishes which have long been silently forming themselves in every loyal heart. Again has he divined the will of the people, and at the fitting time his acts have responded, making, as far as his competence extends, that will the law of the land.

To this intuitive perception of public opinion, and this skill in translating it into action, Mr. Lincoln owes much of the success of his administration. He is at once the leader and the led, and the people regard him with an affectionate confidence, for they see that he has never betrayed them, and they feel that their destinies are in their own keeping, as befits an intelligent and high-souled race at the turning-point of its destiny. The war has taught us many things: we are quick to learn, and we desire that those to whom the conduct of our affairs is intrusted should fully keep pace with us in this costly education. It has been not the least of Mr. Lincoln's merits, that he has been content to learn with us. His errors have been our errors, and though in looking back we may fancy that many things might

have been done sooner, a closer retrospection will prove that we ourselves were not prepared for earlier progress, and that a disregard for our prejudices might at times have proved fatal to the cause.

Yet, in thus obeying the spirit of our democratic institutions, Mr. Lincoln has displayed none of the arts of the demagogue. The transitory passions of the multitude are very different from the slowly formed convictions of the people. The President has known to distinguish between them, and he has at times shown as lofty a firmness to resist the former as he has ever manifested alacrity to respect the latter. That he has never hesitated thus to risk popularity, that he has always been content to abide the sober second thought of his fellow-citizens, proves that his course has been guided neither by the want of self-reliance nor by the promptings of personal ambition. The vital principle of his whole administration has been his recognition of the fact, that our Government is simply a machine for carrying into effect THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE.